

# New Generation of Advocates: Empowering Civil Society in Egypt

## Middle East and North Africa

### Civil Society Development Support for Human Rights

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- 1) **Challenge:** Egyptian civil society is both vibrant and constrained. There are hundreds of non-governmental organizations devoted to expanding civil and political rights in the country, operating in a highly regulated environment. The government employs various laws and practices to silence advocates of reform and crack down on political activism.
- 2) **Approach:** A new generation of young Egyptian citizens is dedicated to expanding political and civil rights in their country. Referred to as the "YouTube Generation," many of these courageous men and women are supported by Freedom House to enhance their outreach, advocacy and effectiveness. The New Generation project helps to reinforce the values of free expression, human rights, women's rights, and rule of law.
- 3) **Activities:** Freedom House empowers Egyptian civil society through:
  - 4) Promoting exchange of experience between democracy advocates in Egypt and in established and emerging democracies to share best practices and foster transnational solidarity.
  - 5) Providing advanced training on civic mobilization, strategic thinking, new media, advocacy and outreach.
  - 6) Professionalizing civil society to monitor, document and report on human rights cases and advocate for legal reform; and
  - 7) Engaging the policy-making community and public in critically assessing the state of freedom through media and other outreach initiatives and public and private forums.
- 8) **Impact:** Freedom House's effort to empower a new generation of advocates has yielded tangible results and the New Generation program in Egypt has gained prominence both locally and internationally. Egyptian visiting fellows from all civil society groups received unprecedented attention and recognition, including meetings in Washington with US Secretary of State, the National Security Advisor, and prominent members of Congress. In the words of Condoleezza Rice, the fellows represent the "hope for the future of Egypt."

- 9) Freedom House fellows acquired skills in civic mobilization, leadership, and strategic planning, and benefit from networking opportunities through interaction with Washington-based donors, international organizations and the media. After returning to Egypt, the fellows received small grants to implement innovative initiatives such as advocating for political reform through Facebook and SMS messaging.
- 10) Each visiting fellow was paired with an International Solidarity Committee (ISC) member, a prominent public figure in Europe or the US, who provides support and mentoring to the young leader. Congressional representatives who are participating in the ISC have begun a campaign to free an Egyptian blogger, Kareem Amer, who has languished in Egyptian prisons for the past two years for expressing his political views. In May 2008, ISC Member Congressman Mark Kirk sent a letter, endorsed by 15 other colleagues, to President Bush urging him to press Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak to release Amer. Later in September 2008, they sent another letter calling for the release of political prisoner Ayman Nour and expressing their support for prominent Egyptian human rights activist Saad Eddin Ibrahim.
- 11) **Contact:** For more information about the program, please contact Katie Zoglin, MENA Senior Program Manager in Washington, D.C., or Sameer Jarrah, Project Director in Jordan.